The oil trade is a very important and lucrative business. Flour is sold in Hsining. The taxes imposed on the mills are very heavy, but the monasteries still enjoy the old privilege granted before 1723, and are exempted from these taxes. Even families in which a Living Buddha has been born enjoy the same privilege, for instance, the Lan family living in Hung nai tzu Valley. Every year, however, the family has to offer 10 pounds of oil at Erh-ku-lung to the intendancy of its Buddha, deceased a century ago. The lamas claim the privilege, which was granted during the Yung lo period (1403–1424), because oil is consumed in the lamps of the temples before the Buddhas, and flour is used by the lamas, the servants of Buddha.

792 [438] 434 651

FORESTS

Only two monasteries possess extensive forests—Seerkok and T'ien-T'ang. Because wood is very scarce in the northern part of the province, forests are an important source of revenue.

792 434 314

TOLL ON BRIDGES

The history of the famous bridge of T'ien T'ang has been recorded. For many years it was a source of large revenue, which finally caused its ruin.

792 434 [494]

The monastery of Kan-ch'an, belonging to the famous Tenma, receives toll on a raft, which ferries passengers across the Ta-t'ung River. Tenma is a very well-known man in the country. His first incarnation, a learned man, was appointed Fa-t'ai in Erh-ku-lung by the first Chang-chia (Huth, p. 279). It is related that he caused the ruin of Erh-ku-lung. In 1723 bLo-bzan bstan-dsin, chief of the revolt, was a prisoner in Hsining, and about to be executed. He heard that Tenma was in the city. Through the guardians of the jail, he implored him to write a letter to the Chinese generals in order to save his life. Tenma, unaware of the consequences of such an act, wrote the letter. The generals got the impression that Erh-ku-lung was mixed up with the revolt, and they destroyed the monastery. This is a fine story, manufactured on the ground out of whole cloth, in order to free the old mother monastery from blame, but why was the blame put on Tenma?

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For many years during the period of my stay, the young Tenma, swelling with ambition, was the most talked-of man in the country for his audacious plan to construct a European suspension bridge over the river, like those in photographs he had seen in magazines. He started buying all the available iron in the country, felling all the big trees growing on the domain of the monastery, and building a large brickyard. Blacksmiths, carpenters, and bricklayers worked for four years. He built four great towers, two on each side of the river. The blacksmiths made enormous iron chains, too heavy to manipulate or to move. He exhausted the entire treasure of the monastery. Troubles started

792 334

[p.45(A)]

among the intendancies and the impoverished lamas. Saddled with debts, and his plans not working out, he was compelled to give up his ambitious dreams and revert to the ancestral raft.

It is said that this holy man enjoyed the gift of bilocation. The people still state that many times many people saw him directing the shifts of blacksmiths and carpenters on the river, and at the same time saw him in ecstatic rapture in the temple.

It was after his financial collapse that he started the trouble with the disciple of his deceased intendant, which lasted for seven years, in order to retrieve his fortunes, only to land in jail in Seerkok. Finally, having debased his name and position of authority, he moved to one of his affiliates in the region of Kan-chou, where he was still living in 1920. Tenma was a typical figure in the world of Living Buddhas in 1910–1920.

COLLECTION OF ALMS IN FAR-OFF COUNTRIES

Expeditions to far-off countries are an important source of revenue. They last for several months and are organized by the various intendancies in their own behalf. Sometimes the supreme chief of a monastery accompanies the expedition. In 1914 T'u-kuan went to the region of the Yellow Tibetans (Uigurs) living around Su-chou. He left on the second of the second moon and was back at Erh-ku-lung in the tenth moon, with 124 cows, 146 horses, 90 sheep, and 2,000 taels. He seemed to be very happy when I visited him after the trip. During the troubles in 1940, T'u-kuan went to Mongolia, among the Urats, and traveled for four years. He visited me at Man-huei in Hou T'ao. He had a lot of trouble entering Hsining with 300 horses and 200 loaded camels because he was suspected of having had connections with the revolting Mongol, Te wang.

When I was in Kumbum in 1912 I met a returning expedition from Kukunor and Ts'aidam with 3,000 sheep, 260 horses, 140 cows, and loaded with butter, wool, skins, and yak hair. All the butchers from Hsining rushed to Kumbum to buy cheap cows and sheep. In December, 1914, I met a caravan of Kumbum returning from Kukunor and Ts'aidam with 6,000 sheep, 150 horses, and 200 cows. On the way they had lost 40 horses. They went to Hsining in order to bring suit against the chief of the tribe on whose territory the horses had been lost. The Amban settled the trouble in one session. He ordered that a kettle containing boiling oil be brought to him. Then he ordered both groups to grasp a one dollar piece he had thrown in the boiling oil. The lamas prostrated, apologized and implored for mercy, but the Tibetan chief tucked up his sleeves and went straight to the kettle. The gesture was sufficient for the Amban. The lamas received two hundred lashes, and were put into jail until a fine of two hundred dollars was brought to the court.